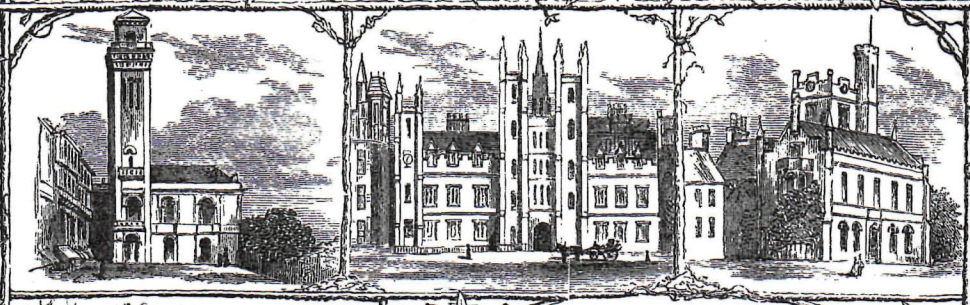
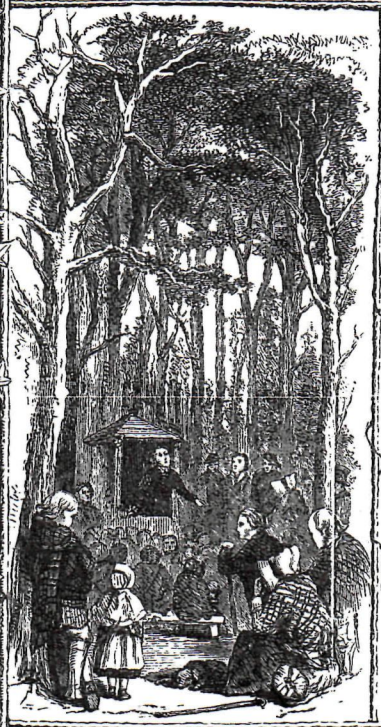
Rev Alexander Macleod of Uig and Rogart in Disruption Worthies of the Highlands (1886), profile by the Rev G L Campbell of Glasgow.





Disruption Worthies

OF THE

Highlands.

A MEMORIAL OF

1843.

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EDINBURGH: JOHN GRANT.

1886.

REFUSAL OF SITE AT STRONTIAN—PREACHING ON BANKS OF LOCH SUNART.—1846.

PREFATORY NOTE.

"Disruption Worthies of the Highlands" is intended to form a companion volume to "Disruption Worthies." It seeks to preserve the features of men whose abundant labours in the ministry of the Word, and in upholding the principle of the spiritual independence of the Church, are still remembered by thousands in the north of Scotland.

The unanimity and enthusiasm with which the people of the Scottish Highlands adopted the principles contended for in the Ten Years' Conflict, seemed to call for a Work which should record the character and services of those devoted Ministers of the Gospel who were largely instrumental in bringing about so important a result as the almost unanimous adherence of the Highland population to the Free Church of Scotland.

The Portraits have, for the most part, been executed by the Woodbury Permanent Photographic Company, London, and it is believed that they will give general satisfaction.

The Frontispiece represents a scene which was not uncommon in the Highlands for several years after the Disruption, that of a congregation worshipping in the open air, in consequence of the refusal by the proprietor of a site for a church. It formed one of a series published under the authority of a Committee of the Church, entitled, "Illustrations of the Principles of Toleration in Scotland."

J. G.

57 Frederick Street,
Edinburgh, 31st May 1877.

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REV. ALEXANDER MACLEOD.

Rev. Alexander Macleod.

ALEXANDER MACLEOD was a native of the parish of Assynt, in Sutherlandshire. He was born at Stoer in that parish in the year 1786. At the age of fourteen he gave evidence of real concern about his soul's salvation. This state of feeling induced him to resort to the ministrations of evangelical ministers wherever they might be found within his reach, the great attraction being communion seasons at Ferintosh, then privileged with the precious gift of the ministry of Mr Charles Calder. On such occasions the minister of Ferintosh would be surrounded by a body of assistants worthy of himself; and the Lord's presence and saving power were with his servants and people to edify believers and to quicken the dead. Mr Macleod has often been heard to acknowledge with gratitude to God, that the effect of the ministrations of the word and the fellowship of God's people at communion seasons at Ferintosh, was to deepen in his heart the work of grace previously begun at Assynt.

The immediate result of his spiritual experience does not seem to have been any intention to give himself to the ministry of the word. For we find him for a considerable time subsequently to his conversion engaged in the ordinary occupations of the natives of the remote district of the country which formed the place of his birth. But at length on reaching the age of manhood he entered on the usual course of prepara-

tion, and, after finishing his studies, he was licensed to preach the gospel by the Presbytery of Tongue in the year 1819.

In the interval between 1819 and 1824 Mr Macleod officiated as minister, first of the Gaelic Chapel of Dundee, and afterwards of that of Cromarty, with what measure of success in either case the writer of this sketch is, owing to the lack of information, unable to say. In the year 1824, however, he was settled as parish minister of Uig, in the island of Lewis, and it is worthy of note that this was the first settlement of an evangelical preacher that occurred in the known history, not only of Uig, but of the whole Long Island. It should not be forgotten here that the instrument in God's hand in bringing about this happy event proved to be the late Honourable Mrs Stuart Mackenzie, a name very dear to the Christian people of Lewis, on account of her warm sympathy with evangelical preaching, and her continued and effective influence in securing the appointment of men of God in the various chapels and parishes throughout the island. It was due mainly to her efforts that, in addition to the introduction of a gospel preacher into Uig, Mr Finlayson of Lochs, Mr Cook of Ness, and others found fields of ministerial labour in the religious waste of Lewis.

At the distance of more than half a century, it is not easy to form a conception of the religious and moral condition of Lewis previously to the year 1824. The present writer has heard a still living minister of the Free Church, who is a native of Uig, declare publicly that only two or three copies of the Bible could be found within the wide extent of the parish, and that he himself travelled a journey of days in search of a copy of the blessed book, and all in vain. Nor would it have availed in the case of all but a few individuals, even if copies of the Word of God were in their possession, literal ignorance so absolutely prevailed on every hand. Schools were unknown; no attempt had ever been made to open up to the people the avenues of knowledge. The entire population was left to perish for lack of knowledge. Until the Gaelic School Society

commenced its operations in Lewis, the densest intellectual and spiritual darkness held universal sway. Notwithstanding the pleasing features that characterise Highlanders, even in their most primitive condition, this state of things could not fail to be attended with baleful fruits. Despite their constitutional warmth of heart and loyalty of nature, unbending fidelity to what they esteemed to be honour, and their unbounded kindness and hospitality, many gross vices were found commingling in the characters and lives of the Lewis people. And Uig was by no means in a better position than other districts. In some respects their moral standing was even worse. As an illustration of this it may be stated that the natives of Uig, being located for the most part on the western shore of Lewis, and thus facing the Atlantic, had, in days when lighthouses and Lloyd's agents were unknown, frequent experience of the material benefit accruing to them on the occurrence of a wreck on their dangerous coasts. The writer has never heard them accused of using any positive measures to further such a catastrophe, unless it can be considered that petitions addressed to the Supreme Being might prove to be such. For, however strange it may appear, at the first prayer-meeting which Mr Macleod attempted to hold at Uig, one of the former elders actually offered a request that a wreck should be cast ashore in the neighbourhood ; while another elder, referring to the death of our Lord as a misfortune, used strong expressions of deprecation of its having at all occurred. One instinctively demands an explanation of the existence of a spiritual desolation so complete as Lewis and Uig in particular presented, at the time referred to, especially when the fact is taken into account that a stated Protestant ministry had for a considerable time been settled among the people. The answer is easily furnished ; the Lewis ministry was not evangelical. Moderatism held the land in sole possession ; it had an opportunity of shewing its nature and effects without let or hindrance ; there was nothing to disturb or modify its reign ; and the island of Lewis during its supremacy furnishes a crowning

instance of its secular selfish indifference to the eternal interests of souls, and its blighting effect on the moral and religious nature and susceptibilities of men. Nor did it act merely in a negative indifferentist manner; Moderatism contained in itself elements of positive distaste to gospel truth and enmity towards gracious influences and experience. Signs of life and earnestness aroused its hostility; it regarded anxious inquiry about the soul's chief concerns as a phase of mental aberration; it would have put down seriousness with a high hand. There are Lewis people still living, one at least in the ministry, who passed through a fiery ordeal at the hands of Moderate ministers and unsympathetic blood relations when the great question, "What must I do to be saved?" pressed heav. upon their hearts. As a matter of course it was perfectly compatible with this system to grant toleration to superstitions and superstitious observances which had been handed down through the dark ages of Popery from the still darker ages of Druidical idolatry. Acts of adoration, having for their object the heavenly bodies, were common, and in some instances were witnessed by Mr Macleod himself, according to a statement publicly made in the hearing of the writer.

It is scarcely necessary to state that family worship was unknown among the people, and even at the manse. For although the public ordinances were dispensed as a matter of form, they exerted no practical influence upon the conduct. They rather tended to lull more profoundly asleep by imparting and maintaining a feeling of security to the poor dark benighted souls who participated in them. It has ever been the wont of the Moderate clergy to huddle their flocks to the Lord's table without respect to the qualifications Scripture enjoins on those who take part in this solemn ordinance. In the Highlands, at all events, their looseness in regard to admission to this ordinance as well as in regard to discipline in general has swept away every barrier, and set an open door before all and sundry, without respect to character or Christian intelligence, and even profession of belief. It should almost seem that communicating

was looked upon as a passport to the favour of heaven by ministers and people alike. At any rate, that religious act was allowed to stand for almost the whole body of religious duties, personal, family, and public. At the outset of Mr Macleod's ministry in Uig this was emphatically the state of matters which existed there, and its leading apparent cause was dead, formal, faithless, cold Moderatism in the pulpit.

It is requisite here to guard against the impression being formed that the first rays of gospel light rose upon Uig contemporaneously with the induction of the first evangelical preacher into that congregation. This is not so. The honour of first introducing the light of truth into Lewis and Uig belongs to the Gaelic School Society. Only the day shall declare the blessed fruits of the labours of the godly men sent forth throughout the darkest parts of the Highlands and Islands by that Association of Christian philanthropists.

When Mr Macleod commenced his exertions in Uig, he found that all the people on attaining a certain age flocked to the Lord's table as a matter of course, and that eight or nine hundred were actual communicants. Nothing could be clearer than that the whole state of their intelligence, or rather want of intelligence, spiritual standing, and general character was utterly unbecoming the place at the communion table which they had been induced to occupy. They did come to church in tolerable numbers from the very outset of Mr Macleod's ministry; but, at the best, only to indicate that "stupid attention" which reveals the vacant mind and unsympathetic heart. The poor people could not help being struck by the contrast between the earnest and faithful demonstrations of law and gospel which were now proclaimed with a loud voice in their ears, and the monotonous repetition by rote of the meagre and almost meaningless stock of less than half-a-dozen discourses which formed the treadmill-round of pulpit exercises in former days. Here, for the first time, was a preacher who shewed by his whole manner that he had in hand business of eternal moment to his hearers. That business

was to warn them of the wrath to come, which impended over unpardoned Christless sinners, and to proclaim the way of escape by the open door of a crucified and risen Saviour. As ever, the preaching of Christ crucified was felt to be the power of God in Uig also. Not more than two months had elapsed since Mr Macleod's admission when the "stupid attention" and vacant stare passed into the wistful anxious listening, the suffused eye, the tender, subdued manner, and in some cases the heart-wringing inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" In addition to the Sabbath services a lecture was held on Thursdays, and prayer-meetings were regularly conducted. Nor were the means of education neglected. Every exertion was made by the devoted pastor to plant schools throughout the parish in every suitable centre of population. And never were minister and people more favoured in regard to teachers, both Gaelic and English, than the minister and people of Uig during the whole period of Mr Macleod's ministry among them. A list of the teachers who laboured in Uig within that period would include future ministers of highest eminence and usefulness in the Highlands, such as the late Rev. John Macrae, the late Rev. John Finlayson, the late Rev. Peter Maclean, the Rev. Alexander Maccoll, and others.

After carefully considering the spiritual circumstances of his flock at the outset of his labours, Mr Macleod came to the conclusion not to dispense the Lord's Supper during the first year of his ministry. He decided that it was his duty to declare to the poor people the whole counsel of God as he might be enabled, and to wait for some time to see what God, by his grace, might work. In the interval between his induction and his first communion, probably about two years, Jehovah had come down, and the mountains had flowed down at his presence. And albeit it may sound strange in some ears, one affecting and significant proof of the mighty change that had come over men's minds and feelings meets us in the fact that only five of eight or nine hundred communicants of Moderate days communicated at the first dispensation of the ordinance by Mr Macleod.

In all, only nine communicants participated on that occasion; but, as Mr Macleod used afterwards to remark, there was good reason to believe they were without exception worthy communicants.

A very early effect of his work was the extinction of various worldly and pernicious customs and amusements to which the people had been previously addicted, and the substitution of meetings for prayer, diets of catechising, day and evening schools, family worship, and other spiritual exercises, in their room. Many at the outset felt greatly aggrieved at the new order of things.

Meanwhile the Lord stood by his servant, and the word mightily prevailed against all opposition. The Spirit of God passed as a breath of life through the valley of dry bones. Multitudes were moved out of their unconcern about eternal realities, a great thirst for the word of life was excited in many hearts. The fountain which sovereign grace had unsealed in the spiritual wilderness of Uig became the centre of attraction, not only to the people of that parish, but also to the whole population of Lewis. Incredible efforts were made by earnest souls in all parts of the island to be present at the preaching of the Word, even on ordinary Sabbaths. Men, and even women, travelled from Ness, Back, and Knock, distances of from twenty to forty miles, to Uig Ferry from Saturday till Sabbath morning to overtake the boats for church, which often required to leave very early on account of head winds, and the distance to be travelled by sea, which cannot be less than ten or twelve miles. Sometimes mothers with infants in their arms might be seen among the companies of gospel pilgrims to the well of ordinances at Uig. No barrier but physical weakness was insurmountable, no labour grudged to get within hearing of the joyful sound; and not in vain was this taking of the kingdom by violence—light, life, and refreshing were graciously communicated to not a few through the Word by the mouth of Christ's faithful messenger of peace. Although Uig became thus a place of resort to thirsty souls on ordinary occasions, it was during communion seasons

that the most extraordinary interest in divine things was revealed. It has been stated on the best authority that, in the year 1828, four years after Mr Macleod's settlement, the whole island seemed to be moved by one powerful spiritual impulse, and that nine thousand people flocked from all parts to the Uig communion. In 1833 a vast concourse of people, many of them from Harris, Uist, &c., attended at the dispensation of the Lord's Supper. At these gatherings the Spirit of the Lord was with his servants and people, new cases of awakening ever occurred, believers increased in light and love, and the cause of Christ received, in various forms, new accessions of strength, while Satan's old rule of darkness, superstition, and folly, seemed tottering to an irretrievable overthrow.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this work of grace was the spirit of prayerfulness which it excited, and the extent to which it pervaded the community. Between the intervals of public worship, and after it was over, especially on communion occasions, every retired spot for miles around would be occupied by a secret worshipper, wrestling with God for the blessing on his own soul and that of others. It was quite common for one, who wished to be entirely alone with the Hearer of prayer, to be under the necessity of travelling miles into the moor or mountain to find a place of complete secrecy beyond the sight and sound of anxious pleaders at the throne of grace. It sometimes happened that an earnest one spent the whole night in the solitude of the moorland in communion with God, unconscious of the outward circumstances or situation until the morning sun appeared in the sky. Did space permit, it would be easy to cite eye-witnesses, who were strangers to Lewis, of the extraordinary spirit of devotion which animated the people as a body at the time referred to. In all circumstances, on sea and land, God was acknowledged as the Giver of all good and the Shield of his people.

Another beautiful aspect of this work was the union of practice with prayer. A naval captain, who lay off the island at that time, and who

had many opportunities of observing the ways of the people, bore this testimony: "They are an extraordinary people here; one cannot but be struck with their honesty, kindness, and sobriety. I think I have never seen a drunk person out of the town. One *hears* of religion elsewhere, but one *sees* it here in everything."

Contemporaneously with the visitation of this dayspring from on high, the grace of liberality to the cause of Christ was first evoked among this people. Its initial exercise was in connection with the Gaelic School Society, and many touching instances occurred of their thoughtful sense of obligation to that institution. In 1835 the Uig people contributed £20 for church extension, an effort which gratified Dr Chalmers very much, and occasioned the observation on his part that about a third of that sum would have been a handsome contribution, considering their circumstances at the time, for the congregation of Uig. Ideas of liberality have expanded since 1835; but even that small beginning could not have been made apart from the descent of the blessing upon Lewis.

It is appropriate to record here the testimony, regarding the state of religion and morals, produced by the revival under Mr Macleod, borne by the late Rev. John Macrae towards the close of his life. After the most varied experience of the work of God in the Highlands, this competent judge, who had the best opportunity of forming an opinion, declared that the finest moral spectacle he had ever beheld during his whole course was presented by the congregation of Uig under the pastorate of the Rev. Alexander Macleod. Uig and Lewis afford a fine illustration of the preparation for the Disruption which was being carried on by God's gracious Spirit through the agency of godly ministers and people. There is a natural alliance, or rather an organic connection, between the doctrines of grace and the doctrine of Christ's Headship, for which the Church of our Fathers was called to testify and contend during the conflict which issued in the severance of the Church from the State in

1843. And this connection has its counterpart in the religious history of our country. The evangel and the kingly supremacy of Christ as Head of the Church, and as Head over all things to the Church, have not been found in our history, any more than in the nature of things, separable into two distinct and independent interests. If the one suffered, the other suffered with it; prosperity in the one laid the foundation for victory as regards the other. Without a divinely-prepared people for the day of decision the eloquent demonstrations of Chalmers, the resistless logic of Cunningham and Candlish, the profound insight into affairs of Buchanan, even the ready self-sacrifice of hundreds of noble ministers of the gospel, were all in vain. But the watchful exalted Head, embracing in his glance all the future, knowing his own purpose, and the appointed time and manner of its accomplishment, foreseeing the fiery ordeal through which men and their professions were soon to pass, prepared the congregations of his people, whom he meant to honour as witnesses for his truth and kingly crown in Scotland, and by preparing them, gave effect to the contendings and testimony of his servants in the high places of the field by securing the embodiment of their principles in the great fact of the Disruption Church, through their enthronement in the hearts of the people.

When the memorable 18th of May 1843 dawned, no part of the country was readier to rally round the banner then displayed, because of the truth, than the island of Lewis, almost to a man. And no individual influence contributed to this result in anything like the same degree as that exerted by the minister of the parish of Uig. He was not, indeed, as at first, alone in the Presbytery of Lewis. The Rev. Robert Finlayson had been at Lochs for many years, and had passed through a somewhat similar experience of divine blessing on his congregation to that already related in the case of Uig. Both were found faithful to their trust, and equal, by God's mercy, to the day of trial; but the first in the field, and the foremost in influence, was the minister of Uig.

It is a mild expression to use that these devoted winners of souls did not hesitate about the course to be followed. It was an unspeakable relief to their spirits to escape by one decided step at once from the bondage of State control and the chilling atmosphere of Moderatism. The cold indifference of the latter to the welfare of immortal souls was as unbearable to their warm Christian hearts as the tyrannical exactions of the former were galling to their high sense of what was due to Zion's sole King. Nor did the people shew less heartiness in the Disruption movement than their ministers. Even where evangelical preaching was lacking, and the minister of the parish remained in the Establishment, the popular movement inclined unanimously towards the cause of the suffering and protesting Church of Scotland, with the exception of a small handful of people in Stornoway.

Subsequently to the Disruption, the work of grace continued to bear fruit in Uig and Lewis generally. It was long noted by those interested in the extension of the Kingdom of Christ, that no communion passed without traces of the divine presence in the rousing of careless sinners to soul concern. Even down to the present time, there are tokens of the gracious working of the Spirit on men's minds, although it is a day of small things compared with the past, and, in the case of some, a day of stumbling and instability. How humbling to behold the first reaction in favour of worldly and Erastian principles, albeit on a small scale, and under the influence of delusive and false representations, manifesting itself on the spot where the gospel banner was first unfurled in Lewis! But there is a God that judgeth in the earth, and his time to vindicate his cause shall come. "Offences must come, but woe unto that man by whom they come."

In December 1843, Mr Macleod was translated from Uig to Lochalsh, and thence to Rogart in May 1846. In the course of his labours in these later fields of usefulness, he was not left without seals of his ministry, but, so far as man could see, there was nothing to bear

comparison with the great ingathering attending his Lewis ministry. After presiding over the Rogart congregation for twenty-three years, he died on the 13th day of November 1869, full of years, and ripe for his reward.

In reviewing the character and qualifications of this saintly man, in connection with his successful efforts to save souls, one comes in contact with the simplest and most harmonious elements of intellectual and moral worth. He was a man of average intelligence who had concentrated all his faculties on the study of the Holy Scriptures, and on winning souls. He possessed in great degree a keen insight into men's character, and shrewdness and tact in dealing with them, combined with the simplicity and transparency of a childlike nature. And all through his Christian life he was a man greatly beloved, not merely by God's children, but by many besides who enjoyed his accquaintance.

He was truly an evangelist. The impression he never failed to make upon those who observed his demeanour was, that necessity was laid upon him to be about his Master's business. Even in ordinary intercourse with his fellow-men he watched for opportunities of commending Christ, and he wisely embraced them when they offered.

But after all it was in proclaiming in the congregation the message of salvation that his whole force of character appeared. Brilliancy or even eloquence in the ordinary sense formed no part of his aim or study. The engrossing purpose of his life and energies was to pluck brands out of the fire, and to speak comfortably to Jerusalem. Such ministers as he have proved the strength and glory of the Church of our Fathers. May a succession of like-minded men never fail our beloved Church or country! They are very signally God's gifts to his Church on earth; and the lesson of their lives is summed up in the inscription on Mr Macleod's tombstone in the Rogart churchyard—"BY THE GRACE OF GOD, I AM WHAT I AM."

G. L. C.